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February 11, 2000

Mr. Bill Richardson
US Dept. of Energy
Forrestal Building
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Mr. Richardson:

We are writing regarding the plan to store nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain, Nevada.

1 Once again, Native Americans are being served up a huge helping of injustice, a future of further damage to their health, and environmental damage.

2 Once again, an industry will get out of cleaning up after themselves, and guess who will step in and do it for them? Of course! The taxpayer!

3 Once again, nuclear waste will be stored in containers which are destined to leak.

4 And once again, our government thinks: "out of sight, out of mind". When will those who shove these programs down the throats of its citizens ever learn how misguided and irresponsible they are??

Sincerely,

Susan & Hubert van Wyck
Susan and Hubert van Wyck
24 Iron Mountain Road
Kent, CT 06757

Enclosure.

The last 150 years have seen a great holocaust. There have been more species lost in the past 150 years than since the Ice Age. During the same time, Indigenous peoples have been disappearing from the face of the Earth. More than 2,000 nations of Indigenous peoples have gone extinct in the Western Hemisphere and one nation disappears from the Amazon rainforest every year.

One half of all reservation lands in the United States is still forested, much of it is old-growth. Remnant pristine forest ecosystems, from the northern boreal forests to the Everglades, largely overlap Native territories.

In the Northwest, virtually every river is home to a people, each as distinct as a species of salmon. The Tillamook, Siletz, Yaquina, Alsea, Siuslaw, Umpqua, Hanis, Mink, Colville, Tututni, Shasta, Costa, and Chero are all peoples living at the mouths of salmon rivers. One hundred and seven stocks of salmon have already become extinct in the Pacific Northwest, and 89 are endangered.

fisherwoman, and community organizer. "Now I am looking at the completion of destruction, from the Exxon Valdez to... those dams... Seventeen fish came down the river last year. None this year. The people are the salmon, and the salmon are the people. How do you quantify that?"

All Our Relations

Native American teachings describe the relations all around - animals, fish, trees, and rocks - as our brothers, sisters, uncles, and grandpas. Our relations to each other, our prayers whispered across generations to our relatives, are what bind our cultures together. The protection, teachings, and gifts of our

BOOK EXCERPT All Our Relations

Reclaiming Our Native Earth

by Winona LaDuke

"Salmon were put here by the creator, and it is our responsibility to harvest and protect the salmon so that the cycle of life continues," explains Pierson Mitchell of the Columbia Intertribal Fishing Commission. "Whenever we have a funeral, we mourn our loved one, yes, but we are also reminded of the loss of our salmon and other traditional foods," laments Yakama Tribal Chairman Bill Yallup, Sr.

The stories of the fish and the people are not so different. Environmental destruction threatens the existence of both. The Tygh band of the Lower Deschutes River in Oregon includes a scant five families, struggling in their traditional way of life and their relationship to the salmon. "I wanted to dance the salmon, know the salmon, say goodbye to the salmon," says Susana Santos, a Tygh artist.

relatives have for generations preserved our families. These relations are honored in ceremony, song, story, and life that keep relations close - to buffalo, sturgeon, salmon, turtles, bears, wolves, and panthers. These are our older relatives - the ones that came before and taught us to live. Their obliteration, by dams, guns, and bounties is an immense loss to Native families and cultures. Their absence may mean that a people sing to a barren river, a caged bear, or a buffalo far away. It is the struggle to preserve what remains and the struggle to recover what has been lost that characterizes much of Native environmentalism. It is these relationships that industrialism seeks to disrupt. Native communities will resist with great determination.

Salmon was presented to me and my family through our religion as our brother. The same

The Turtle by Joe Geshick

There is a direct relationship between the loss of cultural diversity and the loss of biodiversity. Wherever Indigenous peoples still remain, there is also a corresponding enclave of biodiversity. Trickles of rivers still running in the Northwest are home to salmon still being sung back by Native people. The last few Florida panthers remain in the presence of traditional Seminoles, hidden away in the great cypress swamps bordering the Everglades. Some of the largest patches of remaining prairie grasses sway on reservation lands.

What weighs thirty tons, has as much radiation as 200 Hiroshima bombs, and is projected to pass within a half-mile of your home? The answer: A canister of high-level radioactive waste, traveling from one of 109 aging US nuclear powerplants to Yucca Mountain, Nevada - the proposed "final resting place" for America's most deadly garbage.

It is to this mountain, at the heart of the Western Shoshone Nation - a place of deep spiritual significance to Shoshone and Paiute peoples - that the federal government hopes to send 98 percent of the US' radioactive waste generated during the entire Nuclear Age.

Despite heated criticism by Native and environmental forces, Yucca Mountain remains the only site under government study for the permanent disposal of high-level nuclear waste. The Department of Energy (DOE) has already dumped \$3 billion into the projected \$35 billion project. Last August, the DOE released its draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a proposed Nuclear Waste Repository at Yucca Mountain. This marks another step toward opening the dump by the projected completion date of 2010.

More than 200 grassroots groups - Native and non-native - have joined forces to challenge the EIS because it largely sidesteps the issue of transport. High-level waste designated

Nuclear

for Yucca Mountain will be moving on US highways and train routes by the front yards of more than 50 million Americans. Transportation of this waste poses a huge public health risk. DOE studies project a rate of one accident per 343 shipments. That translates into, at the very minimum, 268 accidents over the next 30 years, as up to 90,000 shipments of nuclear waste make their way Yucca Mountain.

The Shoshone are also asking people to support Native land rights issues raised by the EIS. What is continually glossed over by decision-makers - and ignored in the EIS - is the fact

with deer. And our sisters are the roots and berries. And you would treat them as such. Their life to you is just as valuable as another person's would be.

- Margaret Soluskin, Yakama

Toxic Invasion of Native Land

There are more than 700 Native nations on the North American continent. Today, Native America covers four percent of the land in the US, with over 500 federally recognized tribes.

More than 1,200 Native American reserves dot Canada. The Inuit homeland, Nunavut, formerly one-half of Canada's Northwest Territories, is an area of land and water (including Baffin Island) that is five times the size of Texas. Eighty-five percent of Nunavut's population is Native.

While Native peoples have been massacred and fought, cheated and robbed of their historical lands, today their lands are subject to one of the most invasive industrial interventions imaginable. According to the Worldwatch Institute, 317 reservations in the United States are threatened by environmental hazards, ranging from toxic wastes to clearcuts.

Reservations have been targeted as sites for 16 proposed nuclear waste dumps. More than 100 proposals have been floated in recent years to dump toxic waste in Indian communities. Seventy-seven sacred sites have

been disturbed or desecrated through resource extraction and development activities. The federal government is proposing to use Yucca Mountain - a Nevada landmark sacred to the Shoshone - as a dumpsite for the nation's high-level nuclear waste. [See sidebar.]

More than 1,000 slag piles and tailings from abandoned uranium mines sit on Dine (Navajo) land, leaking radioactivity into the air and water. Some groups of Dine teenagers in this region now have a cancer rate 17 times the national average.

According to Tom Goldtooth, executive director of the Native Environmental Network, "Most Indigenous governments are over 22 years behind the states in infrastructure development. The EPA has consistently failed to fund tribes on an equitable basis compared with states. The EPA has a statutory responsibility to allocate financial resources that will provide an equitable allocation between tribal governments and states."

Children of Little Thunder

In our communities, Native environmentalists sing centuries-old songs to renew life, to give thanks for strawberries, to call home fish, and to thank Mother Earth for all her blessings.

We are the descendants of Little Thunder, the Lakota Chief who witnessed the 1855 massacre in Nebraska that cleared out the Great Plains to make way for the cowboys, cattle, and industrial farms. We have seen the great trees felled, the wolves taken for bounty, and the fish stacked and rotting like cordwood. Those memories compel us, and the return of the descendants of these predators provokes us to stand again - stronger and,

hopefully, with more allies.

We are the ones who stand up to the land eaters, the tree eaters, the destroyers and culture eaters. We live off the beaten track, out of the mainstream in small villages, on a vast expanse of prairie, on dry deserts, or in the forests. We often drive old cars, live in old houses and mobile homes. There are usually small children and relatives around, the kids careening underfoot.

We seldom carry briefcases, and we rarely wear suits. You are more likely to find us meeting in a local community center, camping outside or visiting in someone's house than at a convention center or at a \$1,000-per-plate fundraiser.

We organize in small groups with names like Native Americans for a Clean Environment, Dine CARE (Citizens against Ruining Our Environment), Anishinabe Nijii, and the Gwich'in Steering Committee.

We are underfunded at best (more often not funded at all), working out of our homes with a few families or five to ten volunteers. We coalesce in national or continental organizations such as Indigenous Environmental Network, a network of 200-plus groups. IEN provides a diverse agenda of technical and political support to grassroots groups seeking to protect their land, preserve biodiversity, and sustain communities. IEN seeks ultimately to secure environmental justice.

Other Native groups include the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, Honor the Earth, Indigenous Women's Network and the Seventh Generation Fund. In addition to numerous regional organizations, there also are groups based on a shared ecosystem or cultural practice, such as the California Indian Basketweavers Association, Great Lakes Basketmakers, or Council of Elders.

Despite our meager resources, we are winning many hard-fought victories at the local level. We have faced down huge waste dumps and multinational mining, lumber, and oil companies. Throughout the Native nations,

Winona LaDuke



Winona LaDuke is an enrolled member of the Mississippi Band of Anishinabeg. She has won the Reebok Human Rights Award and served as Ralph Nader's vice-presidential running mate on the Green Party ticket. She is the author of *Last Standing Woman* (Voyager Press, 1999).

... and Native Land

that Yucca Mountain lies within Newe Sogobia, land guaranteed to the Western Shoshone Nation by US treaty. The Shoshone want the DOE off their land, and their mountain restored to them.

Upholding the treaty can be an important political and legal tool to stop the dump, but the Shoshone face extreme geographic and political isolation. Without sufficient public support, they fear their voices will not be heard. A statement by Rep. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) added a note of racism to the refrain of low-level logic. According to Graham, "God made Yucca Mountain for the express purpose of stor-

ing high level nuclear waste. There's nothing within 100 miles of the place."



The DOE study admits that the steel canisters inside Yucca Mountain will eventually leak. Nonetheless, the DOE plans to store more than 70,000 tons of spent nuclear fuel in miles of tunnels 1,000 feet underground. At least one of the more than 10,000 storage canisters is expected to fail within the next thousand years. After 10,000 years, the *New York Times* reports, all the canisters may degrade.

What may be worse is that an earthquake at Yucca Mountain could cause groundwater to surge into the storage area, forcing dangerous amounts of plutonium into the atmosphere and contaminating the water supply. This is not an unlikely scenario, given that the area is a seismic minefield. Over the last 20 years, more than 621 earthquakes have been recorded in

Reclaiming... continued

people continue to fight to protect Mother Earth for future generations.

Some of the victories include a moratorium on mining in the sacred hills of the Northern Cheyenne, Blackfeet, and Crow territory, an international campaign that stopped the building of mega-dams in northern Canada; the restoration of thousands of acres of White Earth land in Minnesota; and the rebuilding of a nation in Hawaii.

Grassroots and land-based struggles characterize most of Native environmentalism. We are nations of people with distinct land areas and our leadership and direction emerge from the land on up. Our commitment and tenacity spring from our deep connection to the land. This relationship to land and water is continuously reaffirmed through prayer, deed, and our way of being - *minohimatisiwin*, the "good life."

This relationship survives in remembered phrases down through the generations. You can hear them today spoken in native homes across North America:

This is where my grandmother's and children's umbilical cords are buried....

This is where the great giant lay down to sleep....

These are the four sacred Mountains between which the Creator instructed us to live....

This is the last place our people stopped in our migration here to this village.

Living on the White Earth

I live on an Anishinaabeg reservation called White Earth in northern Minnesota, where I work on land, culture, and environmental issues locally through an organization called the White Earth Land Recovery Project and nationally through a Native foundation called Honor the Earth. We, the Anishinaabeg, are a forest culture. Our creation stories, culture,

and way of life are entirely based on the forest - the source of our medicinal plants, food, and birch-bark baskets.

Virtually my entire reservation was cleared at the turn of the century.

In 1874, Anishinaabe leader Wabunogood said, "I cried and prayed that our trees would not be taken from us, for they are as much ours as is this reservation." Our trees provided the foundation for major lumber companies, including Weyerhaeuser. The destruction of our forests continued for ten decades.

In 1889 and 1890, Minnesota led the country in lumber production, and the state's northwest region was the leading source of timber. Two decades later, 90 percent of White Earth land was controlled by non-Indians, and our people were maddled with disease. Many became refugees in nearby cities. Today, three-fourths of all tribal members live off the reservation. Non-Indians still control ninety percent of our land.

There is a direct link in our community between the loss of biodiversity - the loss of animal and plant life - and the loss of the material and cultural wealth of the White Earth people. But we have resisted. Today, we are in litigation against logging expansion, and the White Earth Land Recovery Project works to restore our forests, recover the land, and restore our traditional forest culture. Our experience of survival and resistance is shared with many others.

In the final analysis, the survival of Native America is fundamentally about the collective survival of all human beings. The question of who gets to determine the destiny of the land - those with the money or those who pray on the land - is a question that is alive throughout society. The question is posed eloquently by Lil'wat grandmother Loretta Pascal:

This is my reason for standing up. To protect all around us, to continue our way of life,

our culture. I ask them, "Where did you get your right to destroy these forests? How does your right supersede my rights?" These are our forests, these are our ancestors.

As Columbia River Tribes activist Ted Strong tells us:

"If this nation has a long way to go before all of our people are truly treated equally without regard to race, religion, or national origin, it has even farther to go before achieving anything that remotely resembles equal treatment for other creatures who called this land home before humans ever set foot upon it...."

While the species themselves - fish, fowl, game, and their habitat - have given us unparalleled wealth, they live crippled in their ability to persist and in conditions of captive squalor. This enslavement and impoverishment of nature is no more tolerable or sensible than enslavement or impoverishment of other human beings....

"Perhaps it is because we are the messengers that not only our sovereignty as [Native] governments but our right to identify with a deity and a history - our right to hold to a set of natural laws as practiced for thousands of years - is under assault. Now more than ever, tribal people must hold onto their timeless and priceless customs and practices."

"The ceremony will continue," Strong says. "This is a testament to the faith of the Indian people. No matter how badly the salmon have been mistreated, no matter how serious the decline, it has doubled their commitment. It has rekindled the hope that today is beginning to grow in many young people."

Excerpted from All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life. Reprinted with permission of the author and South End Press (7 Brookline St., Cambridge, MA 02139, www.lbbs.org/sep).

Nuke Waste... continued

the area, at a magnitude of 2.5 or higher. This may be why the nuclear industry has opposed setting any groundwater radiation standards for the facility, saying it could threaten the entire project.

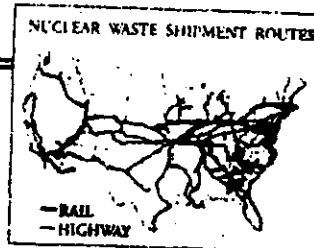
The Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1992 (NWPA) requires that radiation standards for the facility must be set by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA has proposed a 15-millirem-per-year exposure limit for people living near the site, but environmental groups say this is inadequate for the protection of human health.

Shoshone groups are adamant that any additional radiation risk to their community is unacceptable. The Shoshone Nation - site of the US Nevada nuclear testing facility - is already the most-bombed nation on Earth. The Shoshone suffer from widespread cancer, leukemia and other diseases because of fallout from more than 600 atomic explosions in their territory. To add to this risk is outlandish injustice.

In the meantime, pending congressional legislation would rewrite the NWPA to strip the EPA of all authority to set radiation standards at Yucca Mountain. Rewriting the NWPA has been attempted - and defeated - for the past five years. These proposed rewrites would pretty much "throw radiation standards out," says Michael Marriot of the Nuclear Information Resource Service in Washington, DC. With the stroke of a pen, such legislation would miraculously overcome most of the public health hurdles to the Yucca Mountain project.

Over the past few years, the members of the Nuclear Energy Institute (i.e., your electric utilities) have given about \$12.8 million to their congressional delegations to encourage pro-nuclear law that would put an end to their nuclear waste dilemma.

The latest revision of the NWPA allows onsite storage of nuclear waste outside power plants until Yucca Mountain or an "interim" dump site is ready. If the nuclear industry has its way, that "interim dump" may be built in Utah, on Skull Valley Goshute reservation land.



The bill also provides for the federal government (meaning taxpayers) to take ownership of the waste and accept liability for it. What this means is that the utility companies will be abdicating responsibility for waste they created over the past 30 years.